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SYNOPSIS

Master Ardick, just reached his majority and thrown upon his own resources, after stating his case to one Houtchwick, a shipmaster, is shipped as second mate on the "Havana," bound for Havana. Mr. Tym, the supercargo, describes a sail. The strange vessel given chase, but is disabled by the "Havana's" guns. In the fray Capt. Houtchwick and one of the crew are killed, but the "Havana" is found to be little damaged. The first mate, taken charge and goes into the hold to secure a new mate. Several days later, when well out to sea, an English merchantman is met, whose captain has a letter addressed to Jeremiah Hope, at Havana. The crew of the vessel tell strange tales of the buccaner Morgan, who is sailing under the king's commission to take Panama. One night a little later, the English vessel having proceeded on her course, a bit of paper is slipped into Ardick's hand by one of the sailors. This is found to be a warning of a mutiny plot headed by Pradey, the new mate. Ardick consults Mr. Tym. They resolve to secure the mate, but Pradey, reappearing in the cabin, makes through the door and arouses the crew. Capt. Sellinger joins Ardick and Tym. The crew break through the door, but are forced to retire, having lost seven of their number. Finding themselves now too short-handed to manage the boat, Pradey decides to scuttle and desert the vessel, taking his men off the only available boat. The captain, supercargo and second mate soon discover their plight, but hastily constructing a raft, they are just before their vessel sinks. On board they are sent forward with their belongings, but they will be sold as slaves on reaching Panama. The ship's cook they find to be Mac Ivrah, "the Spaniard," a friend of Pradey. Four days later the Spaniard is overhauled by a buccaner flying the English flag. The three Englishmen and Mac Ivrah plan to escape to the buccaner on a ruse. Pradey, the last to attempt to leave the Spaniard, is disabled. Just after the others put off they see a figure standing from the yard arm, whom they suppose is Capt. Sellinger. They now approach the buccaner and hail her.

CHAPTER I.—CONTINUED.

Nearer he came, and at last his broad bow, now in the camp of the spirit, was close at hand. A crowd of figures showed above the low bulwark of the foredeck, and I looked excitedly till one of them should hail. It was only a moment. A man in a uniform and headpiece, standing by the weather vane, leaned over and put his hand to his mouth.

"Raft ahoy!"

I sprang to my feet, all the old strength of my voice returned.

"Board the ship!" I roared back. "We are English!" It was surely unnecessary now to tell him that we were in distress.

She came into the wind, and while her bows beat up a great smother of foam, and her sails flapped and thundered, the line snaked out and I seized it and made it fast. We were hauled rapidly in, and a dozen strong, sun-burned hands helped us scramble up the side.

"Square the yards!" roared the same voice that had hailed me.

Men knocked by me to the after braces, and I was too confused to get out of the way, sailor though I was.

"Well, how is it with you now?" asked a new and quiet voice, and I started and stared like a fool, for the owner of the voice was Nicholas Pradey!

Mr. Tym had waited for me, having gained a step in advance, but the rush over the crowded deck had pressed him back. He was at my side, therefore, when the villain addressed his question to me.

For the life of me I could not lay instant hold of the word to answer. The surprise, the feeling that fate had played us a trick, something like the suggestion that the rogue was destined, in spite of all, to triumph—these mingled impressions confused me and held the words back on my lips.

But as was the business of an instant, and by that time Mr. Tym was at my elbow. He had made out the villain, though it seemed he had not caught the exact purport of the inquiry. He drew himself up sternly and looked the fellow in the face.

"What may be your question, sir? I trust it may be such that the answer can be brief."

"Nay," he answered, leisurely, "your manner is a bit stiff and unfriendly. Best take some further consideration, and then we will discourse. Meanwhile you have wants that shall be attended to. We can fit you and Master Ardick, here, as well as this good fellow, and have the best of the crew."

A big fellow in steel headpiece and body armor, but otherwise in ordinary sea habit, pushed out of the crowd.

"Have these people below. Bestow this one in the vacant berth off the cabin, and find the other bunks in the steerage. Ask Lieut. Niles for a shift for this gentleman—I opine they are near the same business—and have the shop chest overhauled for Master Ardick and the other. In truth," he concluded, with a cold grin, "we do our calling no discredit in bestowing this hospitality, for I can aver that these two, at least, are free-fighting men!"

Mr. Tym puffed out his lips and sucked them back, as his habit was when perplexed or in thought, and after a glance at me, answered:

"Speaking for myself, I would choose as well as for myself—ask us not to exchange more than the strictest need of words with you. Further, I refuse your offer of the cabin, and would be sent forward with my friends."

"Be it as you wish, and as much as you like. I make but one condition—you and the others shall blab nothing of old matters. At a later time I will send for you."

"Well," said Mr. Tym, "we are conformable to that, are we not, friends?" Both Mac Ivrah and I assented.

"Get refreshments, then," said Pradey, turning away, "and at a proper season you shall be summoned."

We followed on dripping in the wake of the lieutenant, and were has down the companion to a plainly furnished cabin.

"Stand by and I will see what can be found to thaw the cookies," said the lieutenant.

He fetched us to the table and took from a locker hard by a hospitable-looking black bottle. Glasses were in the rack overhead, and he filled four and bade us tosa off. It proved to be very good sack, and was most acceptable, chilled and weary as we were.

The lieutenant kept us company, and when we had all emptied a second of the small glasses, he opened the low door leading into the "green-deck," and piloted us along to the steerage. As the ship carried no cargo, all this space was given up to sleeping accommodations, but in truth there was no room to spare, as the company was so great.

The lieutenant, who, like most big, fleshy men, seemed rather good-natured, and who might have been made more so by the wine, bade us find places and make ourselves at home, and withdrew to hunt up the clothes. These came in due time, not ill-fitting sea rig, but better than we expected. Mr. Tym's, in particular, very trim and decent.

While we were shifting, we were relieved Mac Ivrah's curiosity by telling him into whose hands we had fallen. After concluding, we all agreed that we ourselves quietly, treating the buccaners in a civil manner, and beyond that must wait for Pradey's disclosure. What that might be we hampered some guesses about, but, of course, could resolve nothing certain.

We did not specially avoid Pradey, and, indeed, secretly hoped that he would be out with his communication, so that we could tell what to depend upon, but somewhat to our disappointment he made no sign. We talked a little, but guardedly, with the crew, explaining briefly, in answer to their questions, how our adventure occurred, but going into nothing of moment.

The rest of the afternoon passed, and at supper time there was no important change in the situation. The Black Eagle, as our ship was named, very nearly held her own, but carrying fully as much canvas forward as the present wind and her weak, patched-up mast warranted. Supper was served both below and on deck, and we chose ours in the latter place, our mess tub being shared in common with an Englishman, two Swedes and a negro.

We found the fare very good—far beyond what it would be on any merchant ship, and certainly better than it was or is in the royal navy—and everything washed down with plenty of wine and ale.

The meal over, we lounged about the deck, and finally repaired to the mid-

ships weather rail, which we overhung, watching the chase and talking. Pradey at last took in all but his chief sails, the wind now seriously threatening the weak forward spars, and the canvas there was shortened in proportion. It seemed to us now that he had given up all hope of overhauling the Pilana.

The moon rose, and we continued to hang about that part of the deck. All about us the lights of the men's pipes sprang up, and the scene was like a bivouac, with the groups of recumbent figures and the glancing of arms.

Only a small number of persons, as I found, were appointed for a watch. The rest idled about or went below as they pleased. As yet there was no particular disorder among them, and no fighting or noticeable drunkenness.

We were together at the rail, talking in subdued voices, and what the poor captain's death and the things that had happened to us, to a certain degree fallen into a little melancholy, when Mr. Tym's name was spoken, and we turned to behold Pradey.

"Well, sir," said the rascal in an amiable voice, "I trust you and your friends here find yourselves in better spirits than you were. I have a bit of leisure at this time, and if you are ready we will have the discourse I spoke of."

We were quite willing to hear him, and readily said so, and he bade us follow him to the cabin.

The cabin was vacant, as we discovered, and the light of the single small lamp. Pradey signed us to seats on the lockers, and himself took a place at the end of the table, with his back to his own stateroom.

"I do not purpose to waste time in boxing the compass," he began as soon as we were seated, "but will beat the bottom of the business at once. You see me in command of this tiny ship, and I will inform you, if you do not know, that she belongs to Capt. Henry Morgan's fleet of special commissioners. Now I conceive I need not spin out an argument to convince you that your future must depend upon my friendship."

He paused, as though expecting some sort of reply, and Mr. Tym said briefly:

"And if so, what then?"

"Why, then," he went on a little sharply, "it behooves you to do all in your power to please me, and move me to further kindness. Look you! I have little cause to love you, and yet, on easy conditions, I will overlook all. Say that you will join me, and swear to reveal nothing of the old matters, and I will pardon the ill you have done me, and stand your friend. In this offer I include your companion, who, I presume, is posted as to our past relations."

"Well," said Mr. Tym, "we are conformable to that, are we not, friends?" Both Mac Ivrah and I assented.

"Get refreshments, then," said Pradey, turning away, "and at a proper season you shall be summoned."

We followed on dripping in the wake of the lieutenant, and were has down the companion to a plainly furnished cabin.

CHAPTER XI. OF THE BARGAIN WITH PRADEY. I cannot say that I had conceived anything like this, and yet I was not struck with very great surprise. It seemed pretty evident that Pradey could not so well dispose of us as to win us over, if that might be. His crew, though desperate enough, did not precisely sail under the black flag, and to

butcher us in cold blood would make a very stirring bit of talk to the future. If Morgan indeed held a royal commission, then his deeds and those of his captains must not be altogether lawless, and he must not have too much blood of his own countrymen on his hands. Provided that Pradey had found a way to silence the fellows from the industry, he had only to win us over and he might return even to England in safety. But as to complying with his proposition, that was another matter, and one which had more sides than I could turn about and come to a decision on in a moment. Nor did Mr. Tym, bold and resolute as he was, attempt a full and conclusive answer. He glanced at Mac Ivrah and me, and, finding that we were doubtful expressions, made, for him, a very cautious reply.

"We have heard you, Master Pradey," he said, "and while I, speaking for myself, hesitate not to reject one part of your proposition—to wit, that we should join your ship's company—still there are other points in the matter that require thought."

"Well, I will not press you," said Pradey, rather mildly, "and you may have till morning for the answer."

"Meanwhile," said I, thinking it a good time to settle the matter about that we find you here? Also what has become of your companions?"

"Why, that is a short story," said Pradey, with one of his cold grins. "The light of the day we left you it felt quite dark, and the watch having fortified his courage with spirits, suffered himself to fall asleep, and a ship coming up ran us down. Some were killed outright and others drowned, and in the end I was the only one saved. The ship was a buccaner, one of those cruisers sent out by Morgan, and was so unfortunate as to have just lost her captain. He had been killed in a wrangle with the first lieutenant, and the latter had then been shot in turn by one of the crew. As no person was left aboard who was competent to navigation, and as I made no scruple to put myself forward, I was soon chosen captain, and when this was settled we stood away to rejoin the fleet. We shortly came up with it, when Capt. Morgan was pleased to confirm me in my place. About this time news was received of the sailing of the Pilana, with the governor of Panama on board, and, while most of the squadron stood for St. Catherine's, three of us were dispatched to intercept the don. I was the only one fated to fall in with him, and it seems that I have come rather disastrously off. I think you now have the whole story, unless it be that I forgot to tell Morgan and the rest quite all that had formerly happened to me, but upon a yarn about my ship taking fire and we poor creatures barely whipping off at short notice, the others miserably perishing."

"Well, sir, I thank you for the story," said I, "and, in truth, I am sorry for the poor sailors, particularly for Lewson."

"And now," he said, "you might give me, in return, an account of your own faring. Surely, when I looked over the rail to-day and saw your familiar faces I was not a little astonished."

"As we were to see you," said I, "but, after all, it was a simple matter," and with this I went on and related our story.

"At least there are those that are not born to be drowned," he said, laughing, "my worthy self included. Well, go now and think over the other matter. Let me know when you have come to a portion."

We took ourselves off accordingly and returned to the deck.

"Well, friends," said Mr. Tym, as soon as we were secure in our places, "what think you of all we have heard?" Mac Ivrah looked at me to answer, and with a little hesitation I said:

"But for the matter of covering the rogue's crime I should be for accepting his terms. I should count it no such dreadful thing to join the buccaners, though once, I admit, I thought otherwise, and this sentiment is stronger since the death of the poor captain."

Mr. Tym nodded. "Aye, that is my reasoning," he said. "Moreover, it seems that Morgan does really bear a commission from the king. Pradey, as well as before, speaks very confidently of it; so it may be pretty sure of the loyalty of the king. But the villain's old offense—that is the stick!"

Here Mac Ivrah, who had been giving cold heed, put in a word:

"Is there no a middle course? I take it the man might listen to a bit compromise."

"I had been thinking fast as the Scotchman spoke."

"I cannot say," I replied; "I have nothing clear, and yet—Stay! How as to a compromise in time? Say we would agree—under this stress—to cover the villain for a period?"

"I distrust it," said Mr. Tym, shaking his head. "Besides, Pradey would never consent."

"But there is more to the matter," I went on, coming to a clearer conception of the thought myself as I talked. "As you say, he is desperate, and void of all conscience. Could we trust him, in any case?"

"Why, no," he answered, a little perplexed, "but what then?"

"Will he trust us, in turn? The base are always suspicious. Think you not he will seek to make 'way with us, pledge ourselves as we may? Then why would he not agree to the compromise? Say we would swear to be secret till the end of the expedition? He would consent, I think, meaning to destroy us at the first opportunity."

"In truth, there is weight in what you say," said Mr. Tym, beginning to waver. "Aye, doubtless you have the rights of it," he added, almost immediately.

"Let us test it," I said. "Nothing is to be gained by waiting."

My companions agreed, and we accordingly went below and sought Pradey. He was on the quarter-deck, and went aside with us, upon which Mr. Tym made the proposition.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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Wellington Secret Orders.

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